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ABSTRACT

These four newsletter issues provide information on current research and practice to early childhood professionals teaching in the primary grades in Colorado, focusing on education reform and developmentally appropriate practice. The first issue notes research supporting developmentally appropriate practice, describes Kentucky's primary school program, and announces resources for primary grade teachers. The second issue focuses on the use of portfolios for authentic assessments, and a doctoral study contrasting teacher beliefs and practice regarding developmentally appropriate teaching. The third issue explores linkages between Head Start and the primary grades, characteristics of appropriate primary classrooms, and constructivism in the classroom. The fourth issue examines the role of preschool professionals in advocating better elementary schools, notes a study of kindergarten teachers' beliefs, and announces a report by the technical planning group for Goal 1 of the National Education Goals--that all children will start school ready to learn. (KDFB)

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CAEYC

Of Primary Interest

Published co-operatively by the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Association for the Education of Young Children

Winter 1993 Vol. 1 No. 1

ED 442 531

Welcome to the premier edition of this quarterly newsletter, which the **Colorado Department of Education** is publishing co-operatively with the **Colorado Association for the Education of Young Children**. **CAEYC** is the recipient of a 1993-94 Membership Action Group grant from **NAEYC** (the **National Association for the Education of Young Children**), its parent organization, to design a dissemination network to provide support, communication, and networking for those early childhood professionals who are teaching in the primary grades (grades one, two, and three in the elementary school).

This co-operative outreach effort, in support of early childhood staff members, complements **CDE**'s mission of "providing service to Colorado's education community and, through collaboration with this community, to promote high quality learning environments." One of the components of Colorado's Standards Based Education Implementation Plan is "a thorough restructuring of educator preparation and continuing education to meet the needs of the standards based education system." As this newsletter informs primary teachers of restructuring efforts which are taking place and of available resources, and advocates for developmentally appropriate practices and high quality learning environments, it is assisting the Department of Education in fulfilling its mission.

I trust that this newsletter will be a valuable means of communication for primary teachers.

Sincerely,

William T. Randall
Commissioner of Education

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RECENT RESEARCH SUPPORTS DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE IN THE PRIMARY GRADES

Ten recent research studies support the concept of developmentally appropriate practice in the primary grades. Here are some of their findings:

Diane C. Burts and others discovered that children in developmentally inappropriate kindergarten classrooms exhibited significantly more stress behaviors than children in developmentally appropriate kindergarten classrooms (***Frequencies of Observed Stress Behaviors in Kindergarten Children: A Comparison of Developmentally Appropriate and Inappropriate Classrooms,*** 1990). In another study, Burts and her colleagues found that higher levels of stress during standardized testing may negatively affect performance on the test. On end-of-the-year standardized test scores they discovered no significant differences between the scores of children in developmentally appropriate kindergartens and those in developmentally inappropriate kindergartens. The emphasis on academics in developmentally inappropriate classrooms did not result in higher test scores. Burts writes that developmentally inappropriate practices are potentially damaging to the psychological well-being of young children and that they are not effective in promoting achievement in kindergarten students (***Achievement of Kindergarten Children in Developmentally Appropriate and Developmentally Inappropriate Classrooms,*** 1991).

Ellen Frede and W. Steve Barnett found that large-scale public school programs can provide developmentally appropriate experiences for disadvantaged young children which contribute to their increased skills in first grade (***Developmentally Appropriate Public Preschool: A Study***

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RECENT RESEARCH SUPPORTS DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE IN THE PRIMARY GRADES
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of Implementation of the High/Scope Curriculum and Its Effects on Disadvantaged Children's Skills at First Grade, 1992).

Margaret Gallegos compared the academic skill mastery levels between 'play curriculum' and 'direct teacher' instruction groups of preschoolers and kindergartners. Of the 14 skill sections she assessed, the preschool play group scored additional gains over the direct instruction group in 13 of them. The kindergarten play group scored additional gains over the direct instruction group in 11 of the 16 skill sections. Gallegos concluded that, in order for increased academic learning to occur, it is necessary to include play in the curriculum of early childhood programs (***Learning Academic Skills through Play,*** 1983).

Maryann Manning and others studied inner city students for three years (from their entrance into kindergarten until their completion of second grade) and found that those students taught with whole language were better writers, viewed themselves as writers of real texts, had confidence in themselves as writers, and outperformed the students in a skills-oriented program on measures of spelling achievement (***Writing Development of Inner City Primary Students: Comparative Effects of a Whole Language and a Skills-Oriented Program,*** 1990).

Rebecca A. Marcon investigated 295 four-year-olds who were being instructed in three different preschool models in a large, urban school district. Her findings indicated that those children being taught in the child-initiated model demonstrated the greatest mastery of basic skills. As a group these students did even better than those in programs where academics were emphasized and skills were specifically taught (***Differential Effects of Three Preschool Models on Inner-City 4-Year-Olds,*** 1992).

Robbie B. Roberts studied African-American students in two heterogeneous first-grade classrooms in a low socio-economic area of an inner city. Roberts discovered that those students who had been instructed using a whole language curriculum scored significantly higher on all areas of assessment than those students who had been taught using a traditional curriculum emphasizing skill mastery (***Writing Abilities of First Graders: Whole Language and Skills-Based Classrooms,*** 1991).

Lawrence J. Schweinhart and David P. Weikart presented evidence that teacher-directed academic instruction may not be as effective in improving children's social development as early childhood programs that emphasize child-initiated learning (***Education for Young Children Living in Poverty: Child-initiated Learning or Teacher-directed Instruction?,*** 1988).

Carol F. Stice and Nancy P. Bertrand conducted a two-year pilot study about the effectiveness of whole language instructional techniques on the literacy development of 100 at-risk first and second graders. The results of the study concluded that the children in whole language classrooms appeared to feel better about themselves as readers, writers, and learners; seemed to know more about the reading process and to learn the mechanics of reading and writing as well as or better than their traditional counterparts, without high levels of direct skill and drill instruction; and appeared to be on their way to becoming more independent learners than the children in the traditional program (***Whole Language And the Emergent Literacy of At-Risk Children: A Two Year Comparative Study,*** 1990). In an additional study, Stice and others found that the whole-language philosophy created a classroom where children were encouraged to think, make choices, problem-solve, and collaborate on learning in ways quite different from a traditional classroom. Their results also indicated that the whole language teacher spent more time actually teaching during the reading/language arts block than did the traditional teacher ***(Literacy Development in Two Contrasting Classrooms: Building Models of Practice Toward a Theory of Practice,*** 1991).

KENTUCKY'S PRIMARY SCHOOL PROGRAM

The Kentucky Supreme Court ruled in 1989 that the state's educational system was unconstitutional. The Kentucky legislature enacted the **Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA)** in 1990, and that same year the Kentucky Department of Education identified seven essential characteristics which primary schools should possess. These are:

(1) developmentally appropriate educational practices,
(2) multi-age/multi-ability classrooms,
(3) continuous progress,
(4) authentic assessment,
(5) qualitative reporting methods,
(6) professional teamwork, and
(7) positive parental involvement.

Based on these elements, in September of 1992, all elementary schools in Kentucky were required to begin to pilot nongraded primary programs for students in the traditional grades of kindergarten through third grade. For the 1993-94 school year, full implementation of this aspect of the **Primary School Program** is required.

The Kentucky **Primary School Program** is founded on the concept that, although all children can learn, they do not do so in the same way or at the same rate. The program provides students with the developmental "gift of time" and uses a portfolio process to assess when students have mastered the skills necessary for entrance into 4th grade. Strategies used in the pilot programs included integrated language arts, manipulative mathematics, learning centers, cooperative learning, and teaming.

NEW CURRICULUM FOR THE PRIMARY GRADES

A new curriculum is being developed for the primary grades by **Diane T. Dodge** and the staff of **Teaching Strategies, Inc.,** of Washington, D.C. This work-in-progress follows the same practical approach to curriculum as found in the *Creative Curriculum*, **Teaching Strategies'** developmentally appropriate curriculum for three to five-year-olds, which has been used extensively across the country in Head Start, preschool, and kindergarten programs.

The primary curriculum, tentatively entitled *Making Sense of Curriculum in the Primary Grades*, will be closely tied to the performance-based assessment system developed by **Samuel Meisels** of the **University of Michigan.** The written document will include sections on integrating curriculum and assessment, understanding what primary-age children are like developmentally, teaching children to relate positively to others, assisting students with solving problems and resolving conflicts, and helping children to become self-regulated.

Curriculum developed by **Teaching Strategies** is based on the following tenets:

- Children continually learn from their physical and social environment by observing, actively exploring, and using the knowledge and skills they have already acquired to gain new understandings and abilities.
- A rich and well-organized physical environment invites children to try out their ideas, make connections, and construct their own knowledge in a meaningful context.
- Social development cannot be separated from cognitive development. The classroom is seen as a community of development of social competence and self-esteem. In a positive social environment children are able to pursue activities of interest to them and are motivated to learn.
- A partnership between parents and staff, based on mutual respect for the value of each one's role in nurturing the child's development, is central to the curriculum.
- An integrated approach to curriculum, using science and social studies topics as the focus for investigative studies, allows children to think, question, solve problems, and work collaboratively. In this way children acquire concepts in a meaningful context.

FROM TEACHING STRATEGIES' APPROACH TO CURRICULUM

Specific information about both the *Creative Curriculum* and *Making Sense of Curriculum for the Primary Grades*, as well as about other professional resources, may be obtained by contacting **Teaching Strategies** - 4545 42nd Street, N.W. - Suite 306 - Washington, D.C. 20016 - 202-362-7543 - Fax 202-364-7273.

RESOURCES FOR PRIMARY-GRADE CLASSROOM TEACHERS

The Northeast Foundation for Children publishes A ***NOTEBOOK FOR TEACHERS: Making Changes in the Elementary Curriculum,*** in an effort "to allow the reader to explore and experience a developmental approach to curriculum. It presents a position with regard to teaching young children and to making their school lives more effective based upon a developmental philosophy." The book is organized as follows:

Section I: The Foundation
- Basic Patterns of Development
- Historical Background: The Legacy of Arnold Gesell
- Understanding Age Level Versus Grade Level
- Behavioral Characteristics and Classroom Implications

Section II: A Practical Approach
- Developmental Curriculum: A Definition
- The Classroom Environment
- What to Teach
- The Planning Process

Section III: Making Changes
- First Step: A Visit to a Classroom
- Where to Go From Here: Flow Chart
- Approaches That Work: I Am Needed - The Child as Tutor
- The Developmental Curriculum Goes Home
- What Did You Do in School Today?
- A Reflection: When a Teacher Looks Inside
- Resources: Bibliography
- Resources: People Who Can Help
- Postscript: "The Sand-Collar Curriculum".

The Foundation's address is P. O. Box 1024, Greenfield, Massachusetts 01302.

The Society for Developmental Education publishes a newsletter, the ***SDE News***, three times a year in addition to the following books:

- ***Into Teacher's Hands,*** a compendium of articles and handouts on assessment, professional development, integrated language arts, whole language resources, multi-age environments, and "differently abled" students;
- ***Whole Teaching: Keeping Children in the Center of Curriculum and Instruction,*** the sixth edition of the SDE Whole Language Sourcebook; and
- ***The Multiage Resource Book,*** designed to assist teachers in moving to multiage continuous progress education.

The Society's address is Route 202, Box 577, Peterborough, New Hampshire 03458.

STATE UPDATES IN BRIEF

ARIZONA

New guidelines for early childhood programs, based on models developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and by other states, are the product of a year's work by the Arizona State Board of Education's Early Childhood Advisory Council, whose appointment was mandated in 1992 by the Arizona legislature. Arizona State Superintendent of Public Instruction C. Diane Bishop and the Arizona State Board of Education have released a report documenting these principles and practices that comprise quality early childhood programs. Entitled ***Guidelines for Comprehensive Early Childhood Programs***, the report was written and published with the assistance of "Success by 6", a project of Children's Action Alliance, and supported by Honeywell and other Arizona corporations and foundations. It is anticipated that the guidelines will be used by local schools as a means of self-study and evaluation in order to improve the quality of existing programs, and by school districts in order to facilitate the transition of preschool students into public school kindergartens.

COLORADO

Combining the "best practices" for early childhood special education programs with the standards developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the Colorado Department of Education has published a working document, ***Quality Standards For Early Childhood Care and Education Services***. A task force, composed of members of the Statewide Advisory Council on the Care and Education of Young Children and of members of the Department's Early Childhood Management Team, wrote the document. The process resulted in additions to the NAEYC standards in two important areas. One is a greatly increased emphasis on a family-centered approach to early childhood care and education. The second is increased emphasis on community collaboration and coordination in the use of resources.

Material in the ***Quality Standards***, currently being revised, includes a self-evaluation checklist to assist programs in documenting those standards they have achieved, those they are seeking to meet, and the resources needed to meet the standards. The checklist also provides information to the Colorado Department of Education regarding training and assistance needs. The ***Quality Standards*** are to be used as a monitoring instrument for all early childhood programs; programs will be expected to demonstrate that they are using the document as a part of program development and staff development planning.

The ***Quality Standards*** are founded on a position statement, adopted by the Colorado State Board of Education in 1991 which recognizes the crucial importance of partnerships between early childhood programs and families, which supports a quality learning environment for the total child, and which encourages the effective and efficient use of public and private resources to meet children's needs. The Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Department of Social Services are working closely with the Colorado Governor's Early Childhood Professional Standards Task Force, as it develops its proposal for a system of early childhood professional development. The revision of the section of these standards that addresses staff qualifications and staff development will reflect the findings and recommendations of the Task Force.

VERMONT

The state of Vermont has approved a plan to develop a Common Core for Learning, which has implications for all learners. The state's Department of Education is beginning to develop curriculum frameworks, from preschool through grade 12, which address the various fields of knowledge. Information on existing statewide curriculum frameworks for preschool-primary grades may be sent to Jim Squires, Early Education Consultant, Vermont Department of Education, 120 State Street, Montpelier, Vermont 05620.

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Of Primary Interest

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Spring 1994 Vol. 1 No. 2

Welcome to the second edition of this quarterly newsletter, which the **Colorado Department of Education** is publishing co-operatively with the **Colorado Association for the Education of Young Children. CAEYC** is pleased to be involved in this endeavor and to be able to model such a collaborative effort, with the Department of Education, in the area of early childhood care and education.

The feedback which both **CDE** and **CAEYC** have received about the first edition has been extremely encouraging. Requests have been received from across the country for additional copies and for permission to reprint information contained in articles. These requests have come from principals, superintendents, school boards, universities, educational organizations which focus on policy and research and, most importantly, from classroom teachers. It is these individuals, who are daily interacting with young children and facilitating their learning in the primary grades, for whom *Of Primary Interest* is published.

Two aspects of the newsletter have attracted considerable attention. Readers have singled out the inclusion of research about appropriate practices in the primary grades as a welcome contribution, and they have likewise commented positively on seeing a Department of Education logo and that of a state AEYC group 'side-by-side', indicating that in Colorado there is a common mission and purpose which focuses efforts on positively supporting the lives of young children and their families.

Please continue to let **CDE** and **CAEYC** know how they may more effectively meet your individual professional needs with this newsletter.

Sincerely,

Muffy Stright, President
Colorado Association for the Education of Young Children

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AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT: THE CASE FOR PORTFOLIOS

Dr. Adrienne L. Herrell, of California State University, Fresno, is keenly interested in the authentic assessment of young children, particularly of those students in the primary grades. Her work includes the following definitions of portfolios and some rationales for their use in primary-level classrooms:

What Are Portfolios?

1. A work folder is a collection. A portfolio is a selection.
2. The portfolio is a selection of a student's work represented by such documents as actual samples, anecdotal records, photographs, and tape recordings.
3. The teacher, student, and parents are all involved in making selections for the portfolio.
4. The portfolio is organized to show the student's growth and includes summary sheets to document this growth.
5. Cover sheets or brief written statements should explain the selections. As students get older, they can be involved in writing these cover sheets. Young children can dictate brief statements to the teacher about why items were selected for the portfolio.
6. Portfolio items are selected to demonstrate the priorities of the student, teacher, parent, and curriculum.
7. The student's unique interests and competencies should be documented by the items selected.
8. Summary sheets and a few examples of work should be passed on to the next year's teacher. The entire portfolio does not need to be sent.

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AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT: THE CASE FOR PORTFOLIOS

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Why Use Portfolios?

1. Portfolios reflect what is being taught in a teacher's classroom, rather than someone else's idea of what is appropriate for that teacher's students.
2. Portfolios enable teachers to share information about student performance without interpretation of scores. Rubrics are used to reflect relative performance.
3. Portfolios document a wide variety of work in many formats, and help to demonstrate complex, multi-dimensional tasks.
4. Portfolios contain examples of student work over time, thus providing a visual picture of growth.
5. Portfolios provide a natural medium for teacher-student, teacher-parent, teacher-student-parent discussions and goal setting.
6. Portfolios encourage pupil reflection and self evaluation.
7. Portfolios encourage authentic (performance-based) assessment by linking curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

The use of such authentic assessment benefits students by having teachers look at them as individuals, benefits teachers by increasing their interaction with students and by providing ongoing validation for their efforts, and benefits parents by increasing their interaction with teachers regarding the individual progress of their children.

WEEK OF THE YOUNG CHILD

The 1994 Week of the Young Child is scheduled for April 17 - 23. The theme is YOUNG CHILDREN: THEIR FUTURE IN OUR HANDS. For more information contact NAEYC at 1-800-424-2460.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

The Northeast Foundation for Children's address is 71 Montague City Road, Greenfield, MA 01301.

RESEARCH IN THE PRIMARY GRADES COMPARES PRACTICES WITH BELIEFS

Suzanne Kay Adams, in her doctoral dissertation (***Developmentally Appropriate Practice in the Primary Grades: Classroom Practices and Espoused Beliefs of Primary Teachers, Principals, and Teacher Educators***), University of Colorado at Denver, 1992), examined classroom practices and stated beliefs about developmentally appropriate curriculum and instructional methods in the primary grades.

the study

Adams gathered data from 142 first and second grade teachers and 32 principals in public schools in the Denver metropolitan area, and from 45 teacher education faculty members in teacher education certification programs in Colorado. Analyses of the data indicated that (1) principals and teacher educators stated more developmentally appropriate beliefs than primary teachers did, (2) the frequency of some developmentally inappropriate activities suggested the continuing influence of the behaviorist orientation as a dominating force in public school curricula, (3) at times teachers' beliefs tended to be more developmentally appropriate than their classroom activities, and (4) teachers who had early childhood certification provided more developmentally appropriate activities than teachers who had elementary certification only.

reasons for belief/practice disagreement

In writing about the primary teachers' lack of agreement, in her study, between their expressed theory and their actual classroom practices, Adams reviewed other research which suggests that the reasons for such incongruence include influences upon the teacher by external environmental factors. She identified the following as influences which might cause teachers to not put into practice the beliefs which they express: (1) expectations of principals, other teachers, parents, and the general public, (2) accountability mandates from the district and state requiring measurement of student achievement, (3) published materials such as basal textbooks and curriculum guides, (4) student characteristics, (5) working conditions such as material shortages, and (6) shortage of time.

the need for early childhood certification

Adams discovered no difference in the developmental appropriateness of their beliefs about curriculum and instructional practices, between primary teachers with certification in early childhood education and those primary teachers with elementary certification only. Teachers with early childhood certification did, however, provide more developmentally appropriate activities in their classrooms. Her finding supports the recommendation of the Association of Teacher Educators and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) that specialized early childhood teacher certification standards, which are separate from existing elementary certification, be established for teachers in programs serving children from birth through eight years of age.

implications for teacher education programs

Because primary teachers who have specific early childhood training and credentialing are more likely to overcome the external environmental factors which cause beliefs to not be put into practice, Adams found the following implications to be important for teacher education programs:

(1) Teacher education programs need to consider the existing beliefs of prospective teachers and to challenge developmentally inappropriate beliefs by giving preservice teachers objective data regarding child development and learning in the primary years.

(2) Teacher education programs need to assist prospective teachers in making the link between theory and practice so that teachers can translate developmental theory into practical everyday teaching practices.

(3) Teacher education programs should provide preservice teachers various opportunities to observe efficient and manageable classrooms utilizing a child-centered approach. Observing such classrooms in operation may encourage beginning teachers to resist the perceived efficiency of the use of workbooks and direct instruction approaches as more efficient ways to teach basic skills.

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(4) *Preservice teachers need training and hands-on practice with child-centered instructional practices in order to operationalize their beliefs—to translate child development principles to classroom practice.*

(5) *Early childhood teacher certification standards should be established by state boards of education and other certifying agencies to ensure that certified early childhood teachers in programs serving children from birth through the primary grades understand the unique developmental characteristics of young children and the implications for curriculum and instruction. Such certification should be separate from existing elementary and secondary certifications* (pp. 177-178).

implications for the role of the principal

In order to promote developmentally appropriate curriculum and instructional methods for the primary grades, Adams found that elementary principals: (1) should undergo certification programs that emphasize the development of children ages six to eight and the instructional methods and curriculum appropriate for these ages, as opposed to older elementary school children; (2) should hire teachers with early childhood certification for the primary grades; (3) should assist primary teachers in identifying their educational beliefs and philosophical foundations; (4) need to be willing to offer in-class support to help teachers unlearn safe and comfortable ways of teaching and to replace them with developmentally appropriate practices; and (5) must "facilitate the process of modifying teachers' theories-in-use by encouraging opportunities for self-examination and self-improvement," such as release time for attending workshops, reading and discussing research, observing other teachers, engaging in peer coaching, and sharing curriculum and instruction ideas with one another.

> While current theory of mathematics instruction accentuates the child's construction of number concepts through hands-on experiences, achievement tests measure knowledge of numerals.
>
> - Suzanne Kay Adams

implications for school districts and state-level policy makers

Adams found that her research also had implications for policy-makers who may indeed be removed from the primary grades, but working in positions from which they can influence the quality and quantity of support for these early childhood teachers:

(1) *Results of this study support the contention that the behaviorist-learning theory perspective which dominates upper grades, along with recent emphasis on "back to basics," on demands for acceleration from parents, and on improved standardized test scores, result in teachers adopting instructional approaches that are incompatible with research-supported knowledge about how young children learn and develop.*

(2) *Principals and teachers need to be empowered through site-based management to implement a developmentally appropriate primary program in each school. While being required to meet broad district goals and performance measures, schools should have the authority to determine their own instructional policies, to decide how best to group students for instruction, to organize instructional time, and to select and use textbooks and other instructional materials which are consistent with developmentally appropriate beliefs about how young children learn and prosper.*

(3) *Group-administered, standardized, multiple-choice achievement tests should be restricted before third grade. Programs which are mandated to use a standardized test of children's progress for program evaluation or accountability purposes should employ a sampling method to eliminate the need to subject all first and second grade students to a testing procedure. Testing of young children must recognize individual diversity (gender, culture, socio-economic status). Standardized tests should be avoided in multicultural/multilingual communities if they are not sensitive to cultural diversity or bilingualism.*

(4) *To evaluate the effect of a program on children's development and learning, multiple sources of assessment information should be used, including nonstandardized assessments such as systematic observation, checklists, anecdotal records, and samples of children's work. Using such an assessment system also allows accountability to focus primarily on how well schools produce desired results framed in terms of individual school goals, which are compatible with site-based management approaches (pp. 178-186).*

Suzanne Kay Adams' research provides a picture of early childhood education in the public schools of an urban area, and a description of the beliefs and practices which dominate the primary classrooms in those schools. Not only has she applauded the practices she found which are beneficial for young children and their families, but she has also delineated recommendations to improve those instructional practices which are not developmentally appropriate. Her work is a substantial contribution to the literature which calls for appropriate activities in primary classrooms.

Frank Fielden, Editor
Of Primary Interest

THE ALASKA ELEMENTARY RESTRUCTURING NETWORK

As they develop a philosophical base for their restructuring efforts, schools which make a commitment to the **Alaska Elementary Restructuring Network** are expected to consider these four aspects of change:

- the role of the elementary school changing to that of a locus of advocacy for children, particularly focusing on the needs of at-risk children;
- an increased effort to initiate interagency cooperative efforts as a means of solving problems on the behalf of children;
- the restructuring of schools to form developmentally and culturally appropriate early childhood units for children from 4-8 years old; and
- a newly defined partnership role for parents and community working with the public school system.

Jean Ann Alter, who is the Primary Specialist at the Alaska Department of Education, can provide more specific information. Her address is: Alaska Department of Education, 801 West 10th Street - Suite 200, Juneau, Alaska 99801.

OREGON'S NON-GRADED PRIMARY

The Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century, passed by the 1991 Legislative Assembly, calls for a restructured education system to achieve the state's goals of the "best educated citizens in the nation by the year 2000 and a work force equal to any in the world by the year 2010." Ten task forces were subsequently created to explore ways to begin the reform efforts called for by the legislation and to provide direction for its implementation.

One of these task forces dealt with the topic of the non-graded primary; among its recommendations are the following:

- That it is feasible for all school districts in Oregon to implement developmentally appropriate practices in the primary program, kindergarten through grade 3.
- That the State Board of Education require all school districts in Oregon to implement developmentally appropriate practices, which may include mixed-age grouping, in the primary program, by the year 2000.
- That the term non-graded be changed to mixed-age.
- That a blend of state, federal, and local resources be identified and utilized to support increased funding for the primary program.
- That school districts form collaborative agreements with other social service agencies.
- That community based routine health services be available to children and their families at a school identified, centrally located, community site.
- That school districts identify preventive services for all children as a priority and that resources for these services be focused at the earliest possible level.
- That school districts collaborate with other agencies and child care providers to ensure that after school child care is available to all who need it.
- That assessment be continuous and ongoing, possibly including recorded teacher observations, recorded anecdotal notes, recorded student evaluations/reflections, and recorded parent evaluations/reflections.
- That there be no group administered standardized tests before 4th grade, and that statewide standardized assessment begin at 4th grade.
- That materials be concrete, real, relevant, and available to all students, and that textbooks be a resource rather than the primary means of instructional support.
- That by the year 2000 Oregon will require the early childhood endorsement for all primary program (pre-K through grade 3) teachers.
- That there be planned transition for preschool children and their families into public school primary programs.

• from the **Oregon Department of Education's** ***Non-Graded Primary Task Force Report,*** January 1993

The report focuses on school districts' "exhibiting leadership in collaboration with all resource and referral and social service agencies, to ensure a seamless service program to young children and their families." Such collaboration, for instance, may be with existing community providers in the area of extended school-day services and involves other human service agencies. Specific aspects of the recommendation to coordinate comprehensive health and social service to families include the provision of space for social service agencies which is "centrally located for easy access to the school community, within, or as close to the school site as possible" and the provision of community education programs, open to all parents and community members, such as parent resource libraries, parenting classes, parent support groups, and workshops.

For additional information about Oregon's primary vision and/or a copy of the ***Non-Graded Primary Task Force Report,*** contact Anita McClanahan at the Oregon Department of Education - 700 Pringle Parkway SE - Salem, Oregon 97310-0290 (503-378-5585).

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The **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)** commends all parties involved in this newsletter venture to promote communication and information exchange among early childhood professionals teaching in the primary grades. Although our Association has always focused on the full span of development from birth to age eight, the majority of members have been teachers working with children from infancy through age five. This past decade, **NAEYC** has aggressively worked to provide more immediately relevant information and resources to teachers working in the primary grades, and these efforts have stimulated increasing numbers of primary teachers to become active members of **NAEYC.** The resource that has undoubtedly reaped the greatest influence is our position statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). In fact, it is not uncommon to hear kindergarten or primary teachers refer to us as "that DAP organization," rather than as **NAEYC.**

I want to appeal to each reader to take personal responsibility for introducing **NAEYC** to primary teachers. We can provide you with complimentary copies of our journal, ***Young Children***, and our Resource Catalog (membership information is included) to give to prospective members. Call 1-800-424-2460, and ask for the Membership Department. The majority of **NAEYC** members became involved in this organization through the efforts of a colleague or professor. One-on-one invitations to primary teachers to join us will greatly increase our shared efforts to improve the quality of all early childhood education for **all** young children.

Sincerely,

Marilyn M. Smith, Executive Director
National Association for the Education of Young Children

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LINKAGES BETWEEN HEAD START AND THE PRIMARY GRADES ADVOCATED

The Final Report of the Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion has been issued by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. Entitled ***Creating A 21st Century Head Start***, the document sets forth recommendations to the federal government, to Head Start parents and professionals, and to other interested citizens. The recommendations are intended to implement the following three principles:

(1) We must ensure that every Head Start program can deliver on Head Start's vision, by striving for **excellence** in serving both children and families.

(2) We must expand the number of children served and the scope of services provided in a way that is more responsive to the needs of **children and families.**

(3) We must encourage Head Start to forge **partnerships** with key community and state institutions and programs in early childhood, family support, health, education, and mental health, and we must ensure that these partnerships are constantly renewed and recrafted to fit changes in families, communities, and state and national policies.

According to the report, "policymakers and practitioners have a greater understanding of the importance of the 0-8 period and a new vision of systemic early childhood education reform." The Advisory Committee advocates that high quality comprehensive services be provided from Head Start through the primary grades. It also agrees with the National Task Force on School Readiness that educators and parents need to

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LINKAGES BETWEEN HEAD START AND THE PRIMARY GRADES ADVOCATED

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move beyond a goal of transition "as filling the gap between two different types of programs" and towards a goal "of ensuring developmentally appropriate education services, parent involvement, and supportive services for children from birth through the primary grades."

As part of its recommendations the Advisory Committee suggests certain action steps, many of which relate specifically to the primary grades. Some of these are:

- Federal education dollars should be used to facilitate school reforms which ensure that gains made by Head Start children are sustained in the primary grades.
- Changes should be made in federal, state, and local policies to better meet the developmental needs of children and to support the involvement and participation of their families.
- Head Start programs must help parents to understand how the public schools operate and provide techniques for communicating with teachers and other school personnel, for influencing school policy, and for supporting their child's work at home.
- Joint training and technical assistance should be provided to Head Start directors and staff and to public school administrators and staff on transition. Such training might include the following components:
  - how both Head Start and schools can better understand the developmental needs of young children;
  - how the early childhood community, including Head Start, can participate in developing state content standards for the early grades;
  - how schools can maintain links initiated by Head Start between children and community health services, as well as receive existing health records;
  - how both communities can break down perceived barriers to increased communication and collaboration; and
  - how both communities can develop the capacity to effectively meet the special needs of children with diverse learning styles.

Single copies of the Advisory Committee's report are available at no cost from the Public Affairs Office, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 370 L'Enfant Promenade, S.W., Washington, DC 20447.

CHARACTERISTICS OF APPROPRIATE PRIMARY CLASSROOMS

A consensus on what primary classrooms should look like is emerging, as educators and policymakers target the early elementary grades for improvement. Leading experts are now seeking to remedy the neglect which the early childhood years in the elementary school have received as an area of education reform during the last two decades. It is essential that "in the context of rapidly changing demographics and family structures, this country must find ways to improve dramatically instruction in the primary grades," writes David A. Hamburg, President of the Carnegie Corporation of New York in the foreword to Carol E. Copple's ***Starting Right: Reforming Education in the Early Grades (Prekindergarten through Grade 3)***, a report based on a meeting held at the Carnegie Corporation of New York on June 1 and 2, 1992.

During the Carnegie meeting, Penelope Peterson, Professor and Co-Director of the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects, Michigan State University, presented a list of attributes which became the basis for the characteristics delineated, as follows, in the report's Exhibit 1:

What Should Early Grades Classrooms Look Like?

The Teacher and Teaching

The teacher does more questioning than telling, lecturing, or explaining. The teacher does more listening than talking.

The teacher encourages and values multiple approaches, ways of thinking, and ideas rather than a single approach, way of thinking, or idea.

The teacher focuses on the strengths, knowledge, and understandings that children bring to the classroom from their culture, families, and formal and informal learning rather than on their deficiencies or misunderstanding.

Students and Classroom Discourse

Classroom discourse is more like conversation than lecture-recitation.

Students' knowledge, thinking, and understandings are made "visible" through oral and written discourse rather than remaining invisible or implicit in written answers to worksheets.

The students and the teacher use, discuss, and build on students' ideas rather than only using and discussing the teacher's ideas or those in a textbook.

Students personally commit to, and assume greater responsibility for, their own learning rather than complying with teacher demands or responding to external consequences.

Students collaborate rather than only compete in solving problems, in reasoning, in their involvement in inquiry, and in written and oral discourse.

Content

Complex, meaningful problems are posed and challenging, "worthwhile" tasks are constructed by the teacher and the students.

The focus is on depth rather than breadth of content coverage.

Knowledge consists of more than just right answers, facts, or information.

Contexts of Learning

The classroom becomes an authentic learning community rather than assembly line or workplace.

Students' ideas are respected and valued; students are supported for taking risks, offering ideas, and making mistakes; and teachers as well as students revise their thinking and understandings as they learn together.

Children's in-school experiences are related to their out-of-school experiences and culture.

- from ***Starting Right: Reforming Education in the Early Grades (Prekindergarten through Grade 3)***, pp. 5-6

A PARADIGM SHIFT NEEDED IN PRIMARY CLASSROOMS

The Iowa and Nebraska Departments of Education have jointly published ***The Primary Program: Growing and Learning in the Heartland***, a comprehensive guide to assist those who are planning learning activities for children in kindergarten and the primary grades. In a collaborative effort, educators from these two states worked for over a year to produce a document which "represents the best of what teachers know about how young children grow and learn". An unique aspect of this endeavor is that the Ministry of Education in British Columbia gave the Iowa and Nebraska Departments permission to adapt and reprint work which had been done in Canada.

The Primary Program is centered on the need for a shift in the way we (administrators, parents, school board members, and teachers) all think about teaching and learning. Young children are physically and mentally active, constantly using language and interacting with people and objects around them, yet the paradigm which guides their schooling often does not recognize that they are physically and intellectually different than adults. Classroom behaviors which are challenging and difficult to deal with may, in fact, be the result of the paradigm of schooling which values quiet, adult-like classrooms.

Authors of ***The Primary Program*** believe that:
school needs to be a place where problems are posed and solutions are generated; where mistakes are made and valued as learning experiences; where cooperation is nurtured in the face of conflict; where teachers, parents, and children make decisions ***together*** *about what is best for the children.*

In order for schools to become active and interactive environments, in which adults and children can be nurtured and be successful, there must be a shift from the traditional schooling paradigm to a continuum of change. ***The Primary Program*** proposes the implementation of the following shift, adapted from Dr. Patricia K. Arlin's opening address, "New Beginnings," May, 1989, U.B.C., based on Doris Pronin Fromberg's "Kindergarten: Current Circumstances Affecting Curriculum," Teachers' College Record, 90, pp. 392-43:

A PARADIGM SHIFT

Shift from:	To:
Child adapts	Schools adapt
Child as passive	Child as active
Child as dependent	Child as a partner in learning
Whole group instruction	Whole group, small group, and individual instruction
Individual tasks	Balanced small groups, cooperative and individual tasks
Preset material is covered	Children's capacity to learn is extended
3 R'S instructional focus	Focus on concepts, skills, processes, and attitudes in five goal areas
Separate subjects	Integrated subjects
Workbooks	Concrete materials, quality literature, and a variety of resource materials
Verbal information emphasis	Constructivist, problem-solving, thinking emphasis
Single correct answers	Alternative solutions are generated
Work and play divided	Play is one condition of learning
Holiday rituals marked	Multicultural content is based on the study of social experience
Teacher as the sole arbitrator of what is correct	Children as theory builders and negotiators
Grouping is by ability or age	Group is developed by interest, motivation, and learning needs
Assessment is of what a child already knows	Assessment focuses on how a child learns and what a child "can do"
Assessment is for classification and reporting	Assessment is ongoing for purposes of instructional decision-making
Child is recipient of the teacher's teaching	Child is collaborator in own learning
Answers are valued	Questions are valued
Paper and pencil representations	Multiple ways of representing knowledge.

The Primary Program: Growing and Learning in the Heartland, a 650-page guide to developing appropriate learning environments for kindergarten and primary age students, may be ordered from the Office of Child Development, Nebraska Department of Education, 301 Centennial Mall South, P. O. Box 94987, Lincoln, Nebraska 68509-4987. The cost is $25 each, plus $7 postage and handling per copy for orders outside of Iowa and Nebraska.

REPRINT POLICY

Material contained in **Of Primary Interest** may be reprinted in other forms, such as books, newsletters, or journals, provided that a copy of such reprinting is sent to the Colorado Department of Education, and that the reprinting contains the name **Of Primary Interest** and the fact that this newsletter is published co-operatively by the Colorado Association for the Education of Young Children and the Colorado Department of Education. Permission to make photocopies is not required if the copies are to share with parents, teachers, or students; for library reserve; or for personal use; however, the name **Of Primary Interest**, as well as the logos of the two sponsoring agencies, must appear on the copy. Additional issues of the publication may be requested from the editor at the Colorado Department of Education.

CONSTRUCTIVISM IN THE CLASSROOM

ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) has published ***In Search of Understanding: The Case for Constructivist Classrooms,*** by Jacqueline Grennon Brooks and Martin G. Brooks. Constructivism, the process by which people construct their own understandings of the world in which they live, is the means by which teachers may facilitate a learning environment "where students search for meaning, appreciate uncertainty, and inquire responsibly."

Using constructivist principles to argue for school reform, Grennon Brooks and Brooks formulate 12 characteristics of constructivist teachers. These "descriptors" are based on the authors' interactions with students, on their observations in classrooms, and on the work of such researchers and theoreticians as Arlin, Elkind, Kuhn, and Sigel.

Constructivist teachers:

- encourage and accept student autonomy and initiative.
- use raw data and primary sources, along with manipulative, interactive, and physical materials.
- use cognitive terminology such as "classify," "analyze," "predict," and "create," when framing tasks.
- allow student responses to drive lessons, shift instructional strategies, and alter content.
- inquire about students' understandings of concepts before sharing their own understandings of those concepts.
- encourage students to engage in dialogue, both with the teacher and with one another.
- encourage student inquiry by asking thoughtful, open-ended questions and encouraging students to ask questions of each other.
- seek elaboration of students' initial responses.
- engage students in experiences that might engender contradictions to their initial hypotheses and then encourage discussion.
- allow wait time after posing questions.
- provide time for students to construct relationships and create metaphors.
- nurture students' natural curiosity through frequent use of the learning cycle model.

Although ***The Case for Constructivist Classrooms*** is written for teachers of students of all ages, primary-level teachers are a central focus of this audience. Many of the examples provided take place in primary classrooms. The authors conclude by providing six "bold" recommendations, which all teachers need to consider:

1. Structure preservice and inservice teacher education around constructivist principles and practices.
2. Jettison most standardized testing and make assessment meaningful for students.
3. Focus resources more on teachers' professional development than on textbooks and workbooks.
4. Eliminate letter and number grades.
5. Form school-based study groups focused on human developmental principles.
6. Require annual seminars on teaching and learning for administrators and school board members.

The Case for Constructivist Classrooms (Stock #611-93148Y69) may be ordered from ASCD, 1250 N. Pitt Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314-1453 (703-549-9110) for $13.95 plus a $2.50 handling charge.

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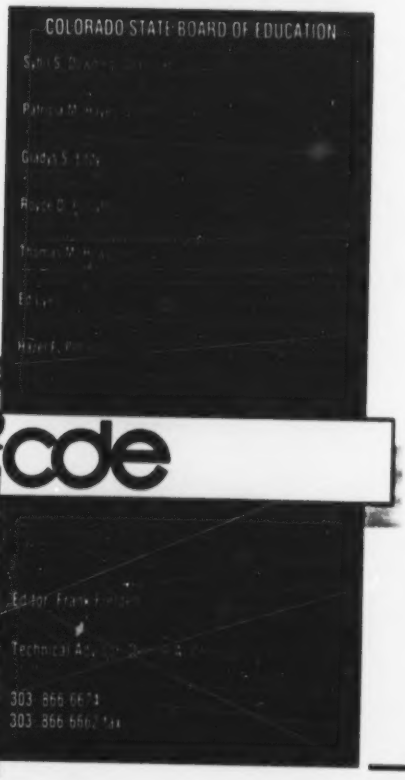
SHOULDN'T PRESCHOOL PEOPLE ADVOCATE FOR BETTER ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS, TOO?

Anne L. Mitchell

With all of the current talk about reform in public schools, it seems to me that we in early childhood education should be speaking up and offering ideas from *our* perspective. With our long-time focus on children and child development, we should be saying, whenever possible, that some major changes need to be made in public education, that these changes are not necessarily the ones already proposed, and, in fact, that some of the proposed changes are not good for children.

All over America, schools from kindergarten on—with exceptions, of course—operate on principles that go directly *against* what we know about children and how they learn; consequently, these schools fail in their mission to help children achieve their greatest potential. Good preschools don't do this! Indeed, from the time nursery/kindergarten education began, its goals and methods have encouraged teachers to work *with* children's nature and individuality, rather than against them. I believe, therefore, that those of us teaching at the preschool level must point out what the focus and philosophy should be at *all* levels of education in America.



Good preschools primarily base their programs on principles of child development. This may not seem earthshaking, but it is the *fundamental* difference in approach between good preschools and typical elementary schools—the former work *with* children, and all too many of the latter work *against* them. At the preschool level, good programs build on the knowledge of what young children are like. Preschools take into account characteristics such as learning style (which is very physical and very social), language abilities, interests, emotional needs, and so on; schedules and curricula are set up with these in mind. At the elementary level, many programs that are considered "good" by those in charge of them focus on what someone has decided needs to be learned in a certain amount, and in a certain amount of time; methods and materials are selected with this in mind. The child is not as important as subject matter. *What* comes first, not *who*. If a child does not learn, then he is the failure, not the system or method.

> Teachers who work with children from birth to eight years of age are all called early childhood educators, but all too often there is a big difference between the training we receive and what the systems we work in expect. We need to work together much more than we do.

We need a *huge* change in the way educators at the elementary level are trained to look at children. They need to learn—as well-trained preschool people are taught to do—to look at children as individuals on their path of development; and if children are not at a certain point, it's because they haven't arrived yet. If they can't do something yet, it's because, in many cases, they're not ready to.

Let's advocate developmentally appropriate education throughout elementary school. Children should be allowed a wide span of years to learn to do things in elementary school. Let's take the pressure off children and their teachers and give children time—*lots* of time if they need it—to develop and learn at their own pace. Teachers will tell you that all of a sudden some children just take hold in the second or third grade, but saying this, the teachers don't seem to connect the fact to readiness. We need to remedy the school, not the children.

Another principle of child development that we recognize in the preschool, and that needs to be emphasized *much* more in the elementary school, is working with the *whole* child. In recent years large amounts of the early childhood education field almost lost sight of this principle, with the push to develop children's cognitive abilities. As our preschool children go on to elementary schools, we need to insist that schools continue to work with the *whole* child so that children can achieve their greatest potential. Expanding only one developmental area is not going to do it; indeed, it is not going to equip children to adequately face the world of the future.

Once we get schools to accept working with *whole* children, perhaps we can move on to getting the schools to work with the whole world—the world the

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SHOULDN'T PRESCHOOL PEOPLE ADVOCATE FOR BETTER ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS, TOO?

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way children see it. In a good preschool we do not split up the world and then feed the pieces back to children a bit at a time. We try to *integrate* learning—to keep the world whole, not fracture it. Most elementary schools, however, divide learning—reading and writing and arithmetic are separate from science and geography and history. South America is studied because fourth grade is when you study South America. Children learn the facts and figures about capitals and population, and the learning doesn't *mean* anything because it's not tied into anything else.

Encourage and help the whole child study the whole world—that's what good preschools do and what developmentally appropriate elementary schools do too. In addition, the whole child should study the whole world with a whole "staff" of educators. In addition to the teachers in the classroom, each child has another teacher or teachers, his parents, of equal if not more importance to him.

We preschool people are aware of recommendations to reform elementary schools — at least the primary grades — in the directions touched upon here, but are we active in the effort? Our excellent elementary school colleagues need our encouragement!

In good preschools, the kind that NAEYC accredits, the door is always open and parents have free access to visit, to confer, and, in many schools, to stay and help as long and as much as they want. Parent-cooperative preschools—in action in many states and especially in my own state of Washington—are based on the philosophy that parents are indeed an integral part of a child's education and that parents' talents, energy, and caring are of great value. Those of us who work constantly to help parents realize this are angry and frustrated to see many elementary schools close the doors and invite parents *out*. Not all, but too many schools do this. Schools should open their doors and include parents as ex-officio members of the staff. Parents and teachers *really should be* partners in the educational process and *have to be* if children are to obtain all they can from school.

These, as I see them, are some of the major implications of properly implemented preschool education for the elementary school, implications that early childhood professionals should be pointing out as we serve on collaborative teams, as we take classes together, and as we act as involved parents. Over a long period of time, we have observed children carefully and have developed goals and methods that work *with* them. Preschool programs are based on understanding children and their level of development, and teachers are trained to do so; preschools work with the *whole* child, rather than on one area of development; learning is *integrated*, rather than fragmented; parents are encouraged to participate, rather than kept out. I believe that these goals and methods are good for children at *all* levels of education and that they should be not only seriously considered but earnestly tried.

Anne L. Mitchell taught for more than 40 years at the preschool, elementary, and college levels. She retired as the coordinator of parents and early childhood education at Olympic College in Bremerton, Washington. This is a condensed version of an article which appeared in ***Young Children*** (July 1993), and which is reprinted here with the permission of the author.

READY OR NOT? WHAT KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS BELIEVE

A document which provides information about kindergarten teachers' beliefs was issued in September, 1993, by the National Center for Education Statistics, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. According to ***Public School Kindergarten Teachers' Views on Children's Readiness for School***, the three most important indicators of a child's "readiness for school" are (1) that the child be physically healthy, rested, and well-nourished; (2) that the child be able to communicate needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in the child's primary language; and (3) that the child be enthusiastic and curious when approaching new activities.

Other highlights:

- Most public school kindergarten teachers (88 percent) believe that readiness for school is a result of children's growing and maturing and cannot, therefore, be pushed. However, 94 percent also believe that they can enhance a child's readiness by providing skill-building experiences.
- Ninety-seven percent of public school kindergarten teachers agree that one of the best ways to help children learn to read is by reading to them, and 90 percent of these same teachers report that their students listen daily to stories read aloud.
- Only 27 percent of public school kindergarten teachers believe that by the end of the kindergarten year all children will be ready for first grade; 70 percent indicate that they would hesitate to send children to first grade if they felt the children were not ready for the demands they would meet there; and 85 percent of these teachers state that they communicate with first grade teachers so that they can proceed from where the kindergarten teacher left off.
- Fifty-four percent of public school kindergarten teachers teach full-day classes. Of those who teach half-day classes, 62 percent teach both a morning and an afternoon kindergarten.
- In U.S. public school kindergartens, the student-to-staff ratio during the spring of 1993, including teachers and paid assistants, was 15 to 1. The student-to-adult ratio, which includes volunteers in the classroom, was 14 to 1.
- Public school kindergarten teachers in the U.S. average nine years of teaching experience in kindergarten. Fifty-four percent majored in early childhood education, and 29 percent are members of early childhood professional associations.

Copies of the report, ***Public School Kindergarten Teacher's Views on Children's Readiness for School***, are available for $7.50 from the Superintendent of Documents, P. O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15250-7954. Its stock number is #065-000-00596-4.

NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS: PLANNING FOR READINESS

The National Education Goals Panel has established a Resource Group and a Technical Planning Group for each goal to assist it in charting the nation's progress toward meeting the goals. In December, 1993, the Goal 1 Technical Planning Group issued a draft report entitled ***Reconsidering Children's Early Development and Learning: Toward Shared Beliefs and Vocabulary.***

Goal One envisions that "by the year 2000 all children in America will start school ready to learn." The Technical Planning Group has suggested that early development and learning may be conceptualized in five dimensions: (1) physical well-being and motor development, (2) social and emotional development, (3) approaches toward learning, (4) language usage, and (5) cognition and general knowledge. Its draft report proposes six action steps to guide the development and implementation of services for young children and their families:

First, the Group will undertake additional work to observe, describe, measure, and understand these five dimensions.

Second, assessments of the strengths and needs of young children entering school need to reflect the five dimensions. Cited as inappropriate are the current testing methods which "focus too narrowly on children's knowledge of pre-literacy and pre-academic information."

Third, to assist schools and teachers in recognizing the five dimensions accurately, ways to assess them in children whose cultural backgrounds are different from the teacher's must be developed. "In the past, individual and cultural variations in the expression of these dimensions have been mistaken for deficiencies in the children. Assessment procedures and instruments must be constructed to recognize and illuminate multiple expressions of outcomes in these dimensions."

Fourth, policymakers and practitioners need to recognize that preparing children for school means helping them become "healthy, adjusted, curious, and expressive, as well as knowledgeable. The best ways to reach high standards may be to attend to children's well-being and then provide learning environments and experiences rich in opportunities to explore, rather than to provide earlier formal academic instruction."

Fifth, teacher training and certification should provide opportunities for teachers to understand, recognize, and nurture the five dimensions of early development and learning, as well as the variety of ways in which different children may demonstrate them.

The sixth action step recommended by ***Reconsidering Children's Early Development and Learning*** is that the delivery of human services should be coordinated among health, education, and other social service agencies at the local, state, and federal levels.

The Goal 1 Technical Planning Group is chaired by Sharon Lynn Kagan of the Yale Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy.

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE AND INTELLECTUALLY AMBITIOUS PRIMARY CLASSROOMS

An article detailing some of the characteristics which should be found in appropriate primary classrooms appeared in a previous edition of **Of Primary Interest.** This list of attributes is to be found in Carol E. Copple's ***Starting Right: Reforming Education in the Early Grades (Prekindergarten through Grade 3)***, a report based on a meeting held at the Carnegie Corporation of New York on June 1 and 2, 1992.

The above report also discusses the two reform concepts of "intellectually ambitious" and "developmentally appropriate." Intellectually ambitious instruction may sound as if it is theoretically opposed to the provision of a nurturing environment in which students develop through play and social interaction. Developmentally appropriate practice may convey the impression that too much is being left to chance. The two ideas are not, however, incompatible or mutually exclusive, according to Copple. Intellectually ambitious instruction, supported by many practitioners in the elementary school reform movement, and developmentally appropriate practice, the backbone of the early childhood tradition, are two distinct concepts proposed by two different sets of people. People interested in the reform of primary education need to talk with proponents of both ideas, and through this dialogue reconcile the presumed differences of these approaches, which are not inherently oppositional. Carol Copple and others believe that primary classrooms should be both intellectually ambitious and developmentally appropriate.

PRIMARY GRADES INTEREST GROUP MISSION STATEMENT

The Primary Grades Interest Group of the **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)** has developed a draft mission statement. The group is composed of teachers of young children, parents and guardians, curriculum developers, teacher educators, administrators, and others who have a particular focus on the welfare and education of children in the early elementary years, kindergarten through third grade.

The Primary Grades Interest Group plans:

- to increase awareness that children in the primary grades constitute a group whose abilities, interests, needs, and ways of learning are distinct from those of preschoolers and younger children, and to support increased attention to primary education within **NAEYC** and among its affiliates and members;
- to encourage the implementation of developmentally appropriate practices in assessment, curriculum development, and instruction in the primary grades, and to provide support and encouragement for those practitioners who are currently involved in such practices;
- to serve as a forum to encourage and support current theory, research, and practice in primary education;
- to celebrate and support cultural, linguistic, developmental, and other forms of diversity for all children within all types of families; and
- to facilitate communication and networking among those who are

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interested in the welfare and education of children in the primary grades.

The draft mission statement was presented at **NAEYC**'s National Institute of Early Childhood Professional Development, held in Chicago in June of this year. In describing the process which resulted in the formulation of the draft, Ken Counselman, member of **NAEYC**'s Governing Board and facilitator of the Primary Grades Interest Group, has written that

*"There was general agreement that our audience was much larger than just the membership of the interest group, or even all of **NAEYC**, and should include policy makers, local communities and school boards, state education offices, superintendents, principals, parent groups, colleges and universities, and others. In addition, there was strong support for using the mission statement and any activities that might come from the group as a powerful networking tool for making connections with a variety of external constituent groups, including the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Head Start, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the PTA, Phi Delta Kappa, and others. Finally, along with general ideas presented in the mission statement itself, specific ideas for activities and directions for the group included promotion of fora concerning care and education of children in the primary grades, establishment of mechanisms (newsletters, publications, workshops, symposia, computer networks) to exchange ideas and concerns about improving services to children in the primary grades, and advocacy for these children and their families within NAEYC and throughout the nation."*

Members of **NAEYC**'s Primary Grades Interest Group are soliciting comments about the draft of the mission statement. Written suggestions may be mailed or faxed to the editor of **Of Primary Interest** at the Colorado Department of Education. The group plans to adopt the mission statement at a workshop session it is presenting at **NAEYC**'s Annual Conference this Fall in Atlanta. The session is entitled ***Critical Issues in the Implementation of Appropriate Practice in the Primary Grades***, and is scheduled from 8:30 to 12:00, on Wednesday, 30 November, at the Georgia World Congress Center.

OTHER NEWSLETTERS AS RESOURCES

Two other newsletters may be of interest to educators and parents of primary-age children.

The Texas Association of Administrators and Supervisors of Programs for Young Children began issuing a quarterly publication last year, the ***TAASPYC Newsletter***. Each newsletter provides several perspectives on one topic; so far, its issues (16-24 pages) have focused on assessment, mixed-age grouping, family and community collaboration, and readiness and retention. For additional information, contact: Cami Jones, Editor, ***TAASPYC Newsletter***, 2901 Barton Skyway #1305, Austin, Texas 78746.

The National All-Day Kindergarten Network is an association of early childhood educators throughout the country who are actively involved in the all-day kindergarten movement. It was founded in 1986 by Susan W. Nall of Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville and by Leslie R. Williams of Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. The purpose of the Network is "to provide guidance in decisions of policy and practice, to serve as a liaison with early childhood projects and professional organizations, and to be a resource for the identification of speakers and materials related to kindergartens."

Published semi-annually, the ***National All-Day Kindergarten Network Newsletter*** has recently explored the connection between the use of an integrated, horizontally expanded curriculum, and the preparation of learning centers in the classroom. Subscriptions, which include annual membership in the Network, are available for $5. Address inquiries to: Susan B. Cruikshank, Editor, ***National All-Day Kindergarten Network Newsletter***, Teachers College, Columbia University, Box 9, New York, New York 10027.

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